

Participant Information Sheet

Interview

1. **Research Project Title:** Menopausal Women's Understanding of Cognitive Changes, Dementia Risk, and Brain-Healthy Behaviour: An Exploratory Mixed-Methods Study

2. **Background, aims of project**

Quick reminder:

This study aims to understand how women experience and make sense of cognitive symptoms (memory and thinking changes) during menopause, and how these experiences relate to concerns about dementia and motivation for brain-healthy behaviours.

You have already completed the online survey. This interview will allow you to share your experiences in your own words and explore topics in greater depth than the survey allowed.

The interviews will help us understand:

- Your personal story of cognitive changes during menopause
- How you make sense of these changes and what you think causes them
- Your thoughts and feelings about dementia and brain health
- How you view midlife/menopause as an important time for protecting your brain health
- What helps or hinders you in looking after your brain health during menopause
- What kind of support or information would be most helpful for women in your situation

This deeper understanding will help us design better support, information, and healthcare approaches for women going through menopause.

3. **Why have I been invited to take part?**

You have been invited because you:

- You completed the online survey

- You indicated interest in participating in a follow-up interview
- You were selected through purposive sampling—we are trying to include women with diverse experiences (different ages, menopausal stages, symptom experiences, and backgrounds) to get a full picture

We are conducting interviews with approximately **10-12 women** across Scotland.

4. Do I have to take part?

No. Taking part in the interview is entirely voluntary. You have already contributed valuable data through the survey, and there is no obligation to participate in the interview. If you decide not to take part, there will be no penalty, and you will still be entered into the prize draw (if you opted in).

Before the interview, you can change your mind at any time before the interview by contacting the researcher. During the interview, you can pause, skip questions, or stop the interview at any time without giving a reason. After the interview, you can withdraw your interview data within 2 weeks of the interview by contacting the researcher. Your interview recording and transcript will be permanently deleted. After 2 weeks, your transcript will be fully anonymised and used in analyses, making it impossible to extract one person's contribution, in that situation, you can withdraw from further contact.

5. What will happen if I take part?

You will complete an interview approximately 40-60 minutes. You can choose to have the interview conducted on video call (Microsoft Teams), Telephone call or In-person meeting (at a location convenient for you, such as a private room at the University of Stirling or a community venue at one of local Brain Health and Dementia Resource centre). The interview can be

conducted at a date and time convenient for you, between April and September 2026. The interview can be conducted in English or Chinese/Mandarin, depending on your preference.

What we will discuss:

The interview will be a conversation about your experiences. There are no right or wrong answers—we want to hear your personal perspective. Topics will include:

- Your life context: What's going on in your life at the moment (work, family, caring responsibilities)
- Your menopause journey: Your experience of menopause so far and any support you've sought
- Cognitive experience: Your experience of memory or thinking changes—when you first noticed them, what they're like, how they affect your daily life
- Making sense of symptoms: What you think causes these changes and where those ideas came from
- Dementia concerns: Your thoughts about dementia and long-term brain health, and whether these affect what you do
- Midlife as a prevention window: Whether you think this life stage is important for brain health
- Barriers and supports: What makes it easier or harder to look after your brain health during menopause
- What would help: What kind of information, advice, or support would be most useful for women in your situation

You can share as much or as little as you feel comfortable with. You can skip any questions you don't want to answer.



Recording: The interview will be audio-recorded so that we can transcribe (type up) what you say accurately. If the interview is conducted via video call, only the audio will be used for analysis (video is just for connection). You will be asked to consent to recording before the interview.

What happens after the interview:

- The recording will be transcribed (typed up) word-for-word
- All identifying information (your name, place names, workplace names, etc.) will be removed or replaced with pseudonyms
- The anonymised transcript will be analysed to identify common themes across all interviews
- The original audio recording will be permanently deleted within 3 months of the interview
- You will be sent a **£25 Amazon voucher** by email within 1 week as a thank-you for your time (depends on university's procedures)

6. Are there any potential risks in taking part?

There are no foreseeable risks in taking part. However, the interview will involve discussing personal experiences of cognitive experiences, menopause, and concerns about dementia. For some people, this might feel slightly uncomfortable or bring up difficult emotions. We will do everything to minimise any uncomfortable feelings: the researcher is trained in sensitive interviewing and will create a supportive, non-judgmental atmosphere, and will pause, check how you're feeling if in need. You can take breaks, skip any questions you don't want to answer, or stop the interview at any time. At the end of the interview, we will provide information about support services. In addition, you can contact the researcher after the interview for additional support information. You're welcome to have a support person (friend, family member or partner) present during the interview. They will also be asked to maintain confidentiality about what is discussed.

7. Are there any benefits in taking part?

Benefits to you:

Some participants find it helpful and therapeutic to talk through their experiences with a supportive listener. You may gain new insights into your own experiences through reflection, and you will receive information about brain health and support services

Benefits to others:

Your participation will contribute to important research that will help researchers understand the real-life experiences of women going through menopause, inform the development of better support, information, and healthcare services. Give voice to women's experiences that are often overlooked in research.

Compensation

You will receive a **£25 Amazon voucher** sent by email within 1 week of completing the interview, as a thank-you for your time. (depends on procedures)

8. Legal basis for processing personal data

As part of this project, we will be recording personal data relating to you (if you choose to provide it for the prize draw or interview follow-up). This will be processed in accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR). Under UK GDPR, the legal basis for processing your personal data will be public interest/the official authority of the University. Further information may be found in the University's [Privacy Notices](#). We will also be processing your sensitive/special categories of personal information relating to your health (cognitive symptoms, menopausal status, medical diagnoses) for research purposes in the public interest.

9. What happens to the data I provide?

Your interview recording: The audio recording will be uploaded and stored on the encrypted, password-protected University's secure server (UK-based). Only the researcher and supervisor

will have access to the recording. The recording will be permanently deleted within 3 months of the interview, once the transcript has been checked for accuracy.

Your interview transcript: All identifying information will be removed. Anonymized transcripts will be stored as password-protected Word documents on encrypted University storage. Only the researcher, supervisor, and potentially a second coder (for quality assurance) will have access. Anonymized transcripts will be kept for a minimum of **10 years** after publication, in line with university research data retention policies.

Use of your words (quotes) in publications: We may use direct quotes from your interview in research publications, reports, and presentations. All quotes will be anonymised (no identifying information will be included). Quotes will be carefully selected and edited if necessary to protect your identity. If you have any concerns about specific things you said being used, please let the researcher know

10. Future uses of the data

Due to the nature of this research, other researchers may find the anonymised data useful for answering other research questions about women's health, menopause, or dementia prevention. We will ask for your explicit consent for your data to be shared in this way and, if you agree, we will ensure that the data collected is untraceable back to you before letting others use it. This is completely optional, you can say no and still participate in the study. If you agree, only fully anonymised data (with all identifying information removed) will be shared.

11. Limits to confidentiality

Please note that assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the University may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.

12. Will the research be published?

Yes, the findings from this research will be published in the researcher's doctoral thesis. In addition, the research may be published in Academic journals (peer-reviewed publications), conference presentations or reports for stakeholder organizations (Brain Health Scotland). You will not be identifiable in any report/publication. All data will be presented in aggregate (combined) form or with pseudonyms if individual quotes are used.

If you would like to receive a summary of the study findings, you can opt in at the end of the interview if you haven't done so during survey. We will send you a plain-language summary (2-3 pages) by email within 3-6 months of completing the study. If you would like a copy of your interview transcript, please let the researcher know.

The University of Stirling is committed to making the outputs of research publicly accessible and supports this commitment through our online open access repository STORRE, and, where possible, open access journals.

13. Who is organising and funding the research?

No funding is received, This research is being conducted as part of a doctoral research project at the University of Stirling and self-funded by the researcher. The study is supported by advisory partnerships with Alzheimer Scotland and Brain Health Scotland, who have provided input on the research design and will help share findings with relevant communities and policymakers. These organizations will not have access to your personal data.

14. Who has reviewed this research project?

The ethical approaches of this project have been approved via The University of Stirling General University Ethics Panel. Ethics Approval Reference: **GUEP 2026 24859 20617**



15. Your rights

You have the right to request to see a copy of the information we hold about you and to request corrections or deletions of the information that is no longer required.

You have the right to withdraw from this project at any time without giving reasons and without consequences to you. You also have the right to object to us processing relevant personal data however, please note that once the data are being analysed and/or results published it may not be possible to remove your data from the study.

16. Who do I contact if I have concerns about this study or I wish to complain?

Questions about the research:

If you would like to discuss the research with someone, please contact:

Researcher: Ailin Chen

Email: ailin.chen@stir.ac.uk

Supervisor: Professor Vivien Swanson

Email: vivien.swanson@stir.ac.uk

Concerns or complaints

If you wish to discuss the research with someone not directly involved in the study, please contact:

Dean of Faculty: Professor Alistair Jump

Email: a.s.jump@stir.ac.uk

You have the right to lodge a complaint against the University regarding data protection issues with the Information Commissioner's Office (<https://ico.org.uk/concerns/>).

Data Protection concerns:



The University's Data Protection Officer is Joanna Morrow, Deputy Secretary. If you have any questions relating to data protection these can be addressed to data.protection@stir.ac.uk in the first instance.

14. Next Steps:

If you would like to take part:

- Read this information sheet carefully (you have at least 48 hours to decide)
- Ask any questions by contacting the researcher
- Think about your preferred interview format (video, phone, or in-person)
- Reply to the invitation email to confirm your interest and preferred format (if you haven't pick one from the survey)
- Schedule a convenient time for the interview (we will work around your availability)
- we will send you an electronic consent form to complete before the interview
- Attend the interview at the scheduled time
- Receive your £25 voucher within 1 week

You can download or save a copy of this information sheet to keep for your records.

Thank you for reading and considering participating in this research.